WORLD CHRONICLE

UNITED NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DURATION: 28' 00"

TRANSCRIPT AS BROADCAST

PROGRAMME: "WORLD CHRONICLE"

GUEST: Philippe Boullé, Director
New York Office
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Obi Emekekwue, News Agency of Nigeria
Ruth Pearson, Business Week Magazine

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SYNOPSIS

UNDRO

Though the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator deals mostly with mitigating the effects of earthquakes and floods, it has recently helped refugees from Iraq, Kuwait, and the Liberian civil war. Once there has been human suffering, says Philippe Boullé, Director of UNDRO's New York Office, it is not possible to rate which disaster is worse, natural or man-made.

"WORLD CHRONICLE" is produced by the Information Products Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, N.Y. 10017, USA.

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Programme No. 413

Recorded on 7 December 1990

VOICE From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

When the Gulf crisis erupted last August, tens of thousands of third-country nationals such as Egyptians, Indians and other Asians, fled Iraq and Kuwait for safety in Jordan. Living conditions were often harsh but there were no epidemics in the camps in which the evacuees were sheltered, no deaths resulting from camp conditions. By mid-October, almost three-quarters of a million of them had been able to go home. A large scale evacuation of this sort was almost unprecedented.

One of the major players in the story was the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization, or UNDRO, based in Geneva. Our guest today is Philippe Boullé, UNDRO's New York Director who was personally involved in the Jordan operation. He will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Raghida Dergham of Al-Hayat of London; Obi Emekekwue of the News Agency of Nigeria; and Ruth Pearson of Business Week Magazine.

Mr. Boullé, welcome to **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Boullé, that was quite an achievement to have gotten away with no deaths in camp conditions, could you tell us a bit about how you succeeded with this remarkable operation? Did you do it in co-operation with the Red Cross,

did you have a lot of doctors there, because as I recall at the beginning of the crisis there were very strong fears of an epidemic of cholera and all the nasty things which could have decimated those poor people who were in the camps.

BOULLE: You are absolutely right. First I would like to say that we did it with the Government of Jordan because obviously it was the Government of Jordan who had the whole responsibility for the operation and who requested the assistance of the United Nations but the United Nations worked in very close contact with organizations like the Red Cross, like also some Jordanian NGOs, and like groups like Médicins sans Frontieres who are "Doctors without Borders" and who had to take care of all these questions relating to epidemics and everything. So it was a logistical operation which had to be carried out by everybody concerned so the success is due to everybody.

LITTLEJOHNS: And did you arrange their eventual evacuation as well?

BOULLE: In this crisis the most important item was to find out that people who were coming out from Jordan were not there to stay. We had to give priority ....

LITTLEJOHNS: Coming out of Iraq.

BOULLE: Yes, into Jordan out of Iraq where the priority really was to repatriate them and so the usual approach in such situations when people come from a border into a country is to arrange for camps conditions so that they are well taken care of and for a long time whilst there in the country the priority was to arrange for repatriation so that the stay in Jordan of these third-country nationals was as short as

possible. So in addition to the actors I've already mentioned, UNDRO requested the assistance of IOM, that's the International Office for Migration based in Geneva and IOM ....

LITTLEJOHNS: That's not part of the U.N. system?

BOULLE: No, it's not part of the U.N. system and IOM was really in charge of most of the repatriation flights. So there were a lot of actors and the problem was to make sure that everyone was playing his part efficiently with the least suffering for the people concerned.

LITTLEJOHNS: The planes to evacuate these people to their own countries, to repatriate them, were provided by the governments concerned?

BOULLE: Well, were provided by the governments concerned, by IOM and also by other donors like the EEC ....

LITTLEJOHNS: The European Community?

BOULLE: Yes, the European Community so you had ...

LITTLEJOHNS: And the United States I presume?

BOULLE: The United States was part of the effort too. But about half of all the flights out of Jordan with evacuees were organized by IOM.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Boullé, your Organization as I understand it has a rather small budget relatively speaking. In the circumstances I take it that most of the money -- you've just mentioned some of the sources -- came from governments and other organizations of that kind but was your role essentially one of technical assistance?

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BOULLE: The role of UNDRO is that we are there to mobilize, direct and co-ordinate external assistance in cases of disasters like this so in that crisis between Iraq and Kuwait and in the coming let's say problems of evacuees to Jordan what we did was precisely that. We were the lead agency for the U.N. in getting funds for the operation, in helping the Government of Jordan organize the repatriation and take care of people in the camps so despite our small budget we mobilized large sums of money which we allocated to IOM for flights, or on the contrary, to bring in food or tents or whatever was needed in camps.

DERGHAM: Mr. Boullé, recently the Security Council adopted a resolution which gives the right to use force after January 15, now as a disaster relief organization do you have any contingency plans should the disaster of war take place post-January 15?

BOULLE: Yes. Obviously this is something which is worrying us. At the beginning of this first influx of evacuees into Jordan nobody was really prepared and there was a lot of suffering for the people who came in and had not been cared for so now we are taking with our other organizations in the U.N. system, a very advanced look at what may come and we have contingency planning which is in place, which is in place with the Government of Jordan, and with also other governments around, just in case there is a sudden influx because of heightened tension in the region.

DERGHAM: Do I understand you correctly when you're speaking about the influx that only that aspect is dealt with in the contingency plans, not inside of Iraq for example or inside of Kuwait?

BOULLE: Yes, you're absolutely right. We are not present in Iraq and in Kuwait and obviously for the time being everything that is done in Iraq and Kuwait is done by the authorities there. We are taking care of what comes out of these two countries as far as influx of people is concerned.

LITTLEJOHNS: Have you proposed establishing a presence in Iraq and Kuwait?

BOULLE: No, because there is not really a need for our organization to be present at this stage because everything as concerns flights have been organized through let's say IOM. Some flights of third-country nationals out of Kuwait and Iraq have been organized through the IOM, the organization I mentioned earlier, but our role is really to help organize a more complex emergency and this is what touches Jordan rather than what comes into Iraq and Kuwait.

DERGHAM: Mr. Boullé, why is it that your contingency plans do not deal with the aspects of the result of a war because apparently, as we know it, is quite an option that is not ruled out? Why don't your contingency plans deal with the disaster that will happen as a result of the war and not only regarding the influx of people who leave these territories?

BOULLE: Yes, but precisely our contingency plan is dealing with the results of a war if it happens but the results of a war if it happens will be outside Iraq and Kuwait and not inside. In case there is something which happens inside Kuwait and Iraq there will be another organization of the U.N. system, or there will be the Red Cross or others that will deal with it. Our involvement is as far as the implications of an eventual conflict would be, but outside of the borders of the territories in which it is happening.

PEARSON: If there is a war wouldn't there be a disaster in the countries where the war takes place?

BOULLE: Absolutely. I thought you were asking a question about what we can do. I'm saying what we can do. I don't say that other organizations cannot do something different but UNDRO normally deals with natural disasters and with sudden disaster situations and they respond to calls from various governments when they ask for our assistance. If we were asked suddenly to organize flights or to organize repatriation or to take care of people inside Iraq and Kuwait we would do so but for the time being, as I said, our contingency plan concerns what we know would happen if such heightened tensions prevailed in the Gulf and this is therefore with the governments of Jordan, Iran, Turkey, and prepare for immediate repatriation of people who would cross over the borders.

EMEKEKWUE: Mr. Boullé the war in Liberia has created a serious disaster situation there, what role is UNDRO playing there right now?

BOULLE: UNDRO has been present in Liberia since the beginning of 1990, in January, when the first fighting broke out. At that time we came in to try to assess what were the needs for assistance to be given to a population which was deprived of food or of the basic necessities. Right now, we are providing technical co-ordination support to the U.N. team which has just been back into Monrovia. As you know, the situation in Monrovia for the inhabitants of Monrovia is very appalling. There is lack of food, there is no medical service and the population is in really miserable state so UNDRO organizes flights of relief supplies now into Monrovia. It also supports the co-ordinating effort of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General who is there and it provides operational

support to organizations like UNICEF, or WFP in their fields of competence in order to make assessments of needs and organize an immediate response to these needs.

EMEKEKWUE: What are the prospects of extending these operations to outside Monrovia?

BOULLE: Of course, as you rightly point out, the problem is not only Monrovia it's the rest of the country. For the time being we have no access to the rest of the country and UNDRO works not in isolation, we work with other members of the U.N. system. We also work with NGOs. Some NGOs are active in the country in Nimba county and elsewhere and we try to, with other organizations of the U.N. system, provide them with the necessary support but we are not present in Liberia except in Monrovia right now.

LITTLEJOHNS: NGOs of course are non-governmental organizations.

PEARSON: Since UNDRO acted so swiftly in the Iranian earthquake which was what, last June?

BOULLE: June.

PEARSON: Is there a role UNDRO plays afterwards in reconstruction?

BOULLE: Yes. I would say that our role really as UNDRO is the response to sudden emergencies during the emergency phase. When the emergency phase is over normally other organizations of the U.N. system take over. However, especially in cases of natural disasters, earthquakes, etc., it is very important to try to rehabilitate and reconstruct so that the

same damage will not come again to you and so UNDRO would work very closely with UNDP and other organizations of the U.N. system in helping in the reconstruction. We would not have the lead role in reconstruction but we would make sure that we provide the necessary inputs about houses, bridges or other facilities are rebuilt in a way that would help them withstand another earthquake.

PEARSON: Could I ask what is the worst disaster that you've witnessed since you've been working in this area?

BOULLE: It's extremely difficult to say because each disaster has got its own different characteristic and it's very difficult to say whether it would be the Armenian earthquake which was absolutely devastating as you know where some towns were completely destroyed or is it the appalling conditions right now in Monrovia. I think it's difficult to rate disasters and once you fall into human suffering it's very difficult to say it was more here than there. I think that from that point of view however, UNDRO is very happy with what happened in Jordan because I think there the most intense human suffering was avoided thanks to co-ordinated action.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE**. Our guest is Philippe Boullé, Director of the New York Office of the U.N. Disaster Relief Organization.

DERGHAM: We know that about three-quarters of a million have already -- back to the Gulf crisis that is just to put it back on track -- about three-quarters of a million people have returned to their homes, those who have departed from Iraq via Jordan. How many remain? What conditions are they under and what are you doing to face the winter?

BOULLE: Facing the winter is of course one problem and when you asked the question about contingency planning of course our problem was to make sure that contingency planning would take care of these conditions of winter. We should not forget that at this time of the year in this region there is rain, and sometimes very cold rain, and winter conditions so this was something we were taking care of. Now, about the number of people still in Iraq and Kuwait I think there is an approximate amount per nationality. If we concentrate on the large numbers these are still people either from Egypt or people from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. As far as the nationals from Egypt and other states are concerned it would be possible to count that more than a million of them are still there. As far as Asian nationals are concerned it could be possible to still have about 100,000 of them out. I would say that the count is extremely difficult. As you know, people have double nationalities, people may have travelled and gone out by routes which are not necessarily known so we are talking of a ballpark figure there and some people also have been in these countries for a very long time and may not want to leave so there are a lot of uncertainties but when you do contingency planning for people who might come out you have to take care of what may eventually come and not be caught short because you calculated too low.

DERGHAM: Before I ask my next question I'd like you to clarify, you're talking about those people inside of Iraq and Kuwait or in the Jordanian camps?

BOULLE: No, I'm talking about people inside Iraq and Kuwait. In the Jordanian camps today you don't have more than about 1,000-2,000 people. Some of them are coming from countries to which they have some difficulties to go back.

DERGHAM: Mr. Boullé, why is it that we have heard of this disaster relief towards the Asian nationals? We have not heard much about the Westerners. Is it because Western governments have taken quick care of their nationals and the other Asians left poorly because the governments didn't have money to airlift them? Could you explain this because there's been some indication of possible racism in this issue? Can you either confirm it or dispel it?

BOULLE: I think that the explanation is very simple. When I've just mentioned the case of one million Egyptians think about for some Western nationals what would be the number, maybe 30 or 40 per nationality. It's not that much. So the problem was, in Iraq and Kuwait the largest percentage of the foreign work force was people from Egypt or Yemen or Sudan or people from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, etc. There were probably 80,000 women from Sri Lanka working in Kuwait before the crisis erupted so it's a question of numbers. It's always easy to have plane tickets for 10 people, it is a little bit more difficult to have plane tickets for 80,000 people. By the way this explains why the operation in Jordan had to be logistically carried out in a certain way because you had to put people in camp areas by nationality. You could not mix everybody together because when you bring them to the airport you had planes going to India, planes going to Sri Lanka, planes going to various destinations like this, so for efficiency this was done this way. I think that's the explanation.

LITTLEJOHNS: Raghida used the word racism but in fact it was economics more than racism?

BOULLE: I think the problem in humanitarian circumstances is that a lot of these words do not have any real significance because first sometimes you don't know to what nationality you are talking. People come in and you have to render assistance immediately. The governments of the countries with the largest number of nationals like India for example, organized themselves extremely well. After the first days of the crisis people organized themselves within Iraq and Kuwait. Busloads would be coming and we would know how many busloads would be coming into Jordan, we would know how much time these people would spend in Jordan -- which would be about five days -- and then the government of India itself financed a large number of flights directly out of Amman. Finance was also available from the European Econcmic Community and also from the IOM so the problem was an immense logistical problem. 10,000-15,000 people coming in daily; 10,000-15,000 people having to be moved from one camp to another daily; and 10,000-15,000 people having to be airlifted per day which means about 40-50 flights per day out of Amman airport when the usual take off at the Amman airport is about 5-10 flights per day. So if you think in terms of huge airports here having to multiply their outtake capacity by four times per day you will see this was the problem.

EMEKEKWUE: The Secretary-Genoral of the U.N. recently appealed for aid of about $13.8 million as assistance for the victims of the Liberian war, has there been any response to this appeal?

BOULLE: Well, the appeal will certainly meet with I think a large success. I would like to say that this appeal for $13 million is for immediate emergency assistance in Monrovia now. There have been appeals also for the people who left Liberia and who are now in the neighbouring countries -- Sierra

Leone or Cote d'Ivoire or Guinea. Right now, to put the numbers into all of this, you probably have 1.5 million people displaced in Liberia itself and you have people having left Liberia and who have sought refuge in Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea totalling about 800,000. So you can see that there's quite a large number of people affected so that the appeal which has been launched in December by the Secretary-General consists of really emergency assistance immediately to be made available in Monrovia itself. The figures will be much larger when one takes into account all of the situation.

EMEKEKWUE: And what was the level of the relief materials required by this group immediately?

BOULLE: In the first emergency plan it's really basic emergency. There is not enough water, there are no hospitals available, there is no food available. There is in Monrovia NGOs, local non-governmental organizations and others, and external also, who are registering people and there are 90,000 children who need to be looked after in the coming months so the first emergency plan is to re-establish the basis for resumption of activities and then there would be something much larger coming on later.

PEARSON: On the subject of Jordan, as I understand it, the King paid for the assistance to the nationals in the beginning. I think it was something like $50 million out of his own government's pocket. Was he repaid for that?

BOULLE: Well, it's an interesting question because obviously part of the success which we mentioned in this operation was due as I said earlier to the Government of Jordan itself. It didn't wait for money and external assistance to come. It used its own resources. Part of this $50 million has

been returned to Jordan but not every small portion of it and so I think the Jordanian Government is still waiting to get from the international community some sort of replenishment of the stocks it used, of the money it's made available when it fed people in the camps, when it moved them from one camp to another.

DERGHAM: Why is that, Mr. Boullé? Why is it the Jordanians were not compensated while we know that there was a rush to help Turkey as immediately affected by the crisis, also Egypt? Why is Jordan not treated equally inasfar as relief from their responsibilities as an affected country? Is it political, is it because of its political position?

BOULLE: No, not at all. The problem was that the immediate response of the Jordanian government was to say we're not going to wait two, three, four days before we get some food or before we get money to pay for internal transport. We are going to do it ourselves because it is our humanitarian responsibility. There was a lot of money pledged to Jordan, probably much more than to any other country. Just for transport for example out of Jordan $65 million was used and donated by foreign governments but the problem is that it's very difficult to replenish. People usually try to give food, they try to give transport, they have sometimes to give according to a specific area and it's very difficult sometimes to get paid back for what you've done yourself. As I said, part of it has already been done and for three months now UNDRO has been going to each and every capital of donor governments asking them to make a little bit more of payment of cash back to Jordan for what it did.

PEARSON: But won't that set a bad example in the future if governments want to suddenly pay for the disaster themselves won't they have the fear that they won't be repaid?

BOULLE: Yes, again if there is a disaster in Iran like an earthquake the Iranian government feels a responsibility for its own people. In Jordan, Jordan was helping third country nationals not Jordanians themselves. You're right. If there is some replenishment which is not done that might tell other governments, well let's wait until the money comes before we do anything about it. But this is a question we are working on now and in fact we are asking governments to give us in advance now, some contingency funding so that we can come in as soon as possible with some money up-front as we say so that all these efforts can be started immediately.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr, Boullé, we've talked a good deal about what one may call political disasters, tell us a bit about UNDRO's activities dealing with natural disasters? For instance there was a very serious cyclone in the Philippines. I believe that UNDRO was very quick to move into that situation.

BOULLE: Thank you for the question because obviously most of our mandate is with natural disasters and there has been a terrible cyclone in the Philippines but the Philippines also suffered earlier on in 1990 a terrible earthquake too. Honduras has suffered windstorms and there is always some natural disaster coming in which creates a lot of havoc within a given set up and sometimes not enough attention is being given to it. As soon as there is a disaster somewhere, a natural disaster, UNDRO is intervening in order to support the local efforts to deal with the disasters. We always come to support and facilitate and I would say that I think we are doing, with the governments of certain countries which are disaster-prone, quite a good work of trying to prevent also the impact of disasters. Mitigation might help reduce the impact of disasters and this is one of UNDRO's mandates, trying to make sure that whenever a disaster comes it causes the least damage.

DERGHAM: What about individuals? How do individuals react in terms of disaster?

BOULLE: You know that in an earthquake we say that victims are usually rescued by other victims. The time scale is such that you have to come to the assistance of the victims within 12 hours or 18 hours, or at most 24 hours, which means that any external force coming in takes time to come in.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Boullé, I'm afraid that our programme is being rescued by the time limitations. That's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

Our guest has been Philippe Boullé, the Director of the New York Office of the U.N. Disaster Relief Organization. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Raghida Dergham of Al-Hayat of London; Obi Emekekwue of the News Agency of Nigeria; and Ruth Pearson of Business Week Magazine.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

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